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ABSTRACT

The bilingual education movement, begun in the 1960's and virtually mandated by the 1974 Supreme Court Lau vs. Nichols decision, is highly controversial due to public perceptions of bilingual programs; the apparent departure from traditional school language policy; and the concept of bilingual education as a strategy for realizing the social, political, and economic aspirations of Hispanic Americans. Prior to the reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act in 1982, supporters of bilingual education face the major challenges of educational justification of what has become a political situation and solving the many problems embedded in the movement. The strong Guidelines for the 1978 Amendments to the Bilingual Education Act will help in the areas of curriculum development, funding, and research. Undeniably, bilingual education has grown dramatically since 1968 and has been a vehicle enabling Hispanics to press for their language rights and giving them a point of entry into all other issues related to Hispanic rights and opportunities. Bilingual education will continue to be significant especially in the education of mainland Puerto Rican children returning to the island and to the children of undocumented workers from Mexico, and in helping Hispanic children in general gain essential credentials for better employment. (SB)

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Bilingual education and the Hispanic challenge

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Bilingual education and the Hispanic challenge

In retrospect, the 1970's will certainly be seen as a period of reassessment of the great federal social programs of the previous decade. While a review of the achievements of these programs was not in itself inappropriate, many of the specific evaluations that comprised it are now known to have been poorly conceived or politically inspired. Among the programs reviewed, the experiments designed to help ensure equality of educational opportunity for disadvantaged children came in for particularly heavy attack. Most have managed to survive, but the broad public base of support for them has largely eroded, and those who advocate continuation of such programs face a constant uphill battle to maintain funding levels.

The latest federally supported educational program to come under public scrutiny is bilingual education.

Bilingual education is an instructional tool that has developed quietly over the past decade and a half to help students whose first language is not English overcome their linguistic and academic difficulties and, it is hoped, perform as well as their English-speaking peers in school. While the particular approaches used vary widely, the term usually refers to programs that employ a child's native tongue as a medium of instruction while he or she is being helped to learn English. The theory is that, by enabling students to master cognitive skills in the language they know best before making the transition to English, bilingual classes will prevent academic retardation. Often, a secondary aim is to enhance and maintain a child's proficiency in the home language. Classes also frequently draw on a child's heritage and culture as a means of building self-esteem and increasing comprehension and motivation to learn.

This essay is the president's annual statement on an issue of current interest. It represents his personal views and, although broadly related to the foundation's interests, does not directly reflect its specific programs.

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There are an estimated 3.6 million pupils in the country judged to be in need of some form of special language assistance to enable them to cope with the regular school curriculum.

The federal government began funding demonstration programs in bilingual education in the late 1960's and has steadily expanded its support since then, from $7.5 million in 1969, affecting some 76 projects reaching about 26,000 children, to $107 million in 1980, for about 575 projects reaching roughly 315,000 children. Meanwhile, under the stimulus of federal and court action, state and local governments have expanded their support for bilingual education, too, so that together they now more than match annual federal funding.

It is safe to say that the total amount of money spent in the field, although not insignificant, would scarcely make a dent in the national budget for compensatory education programs. Over $3 billion, for example, was appropriated in 1980 just for Title I, the largest of such federally supported programs of special assistance to "educationally deprived children in low-income areas."

Nonetheless, despite the fact that expenditures for bilingual education are comparatively low and that it reaches only a fraction of eligible pupils, the program has become highly controversial. Indeed, few other educational experiments in recent years have managed to arouse such passionate debate—so much so, in fact, that the future of this promising pedagogical tool is uncertain.

The reasons for this are complex and probably only a matter of speculation. One source of the controversy, surely, is to be found in public perceptions about the record of accomplishment in bilingual education thus far. Generalizations are unwise at this stage: the few evaluation studies that have been done are not considered a fair assessment of bilingual education's potential. But indications are that many bilingual programs were launched hastily, with little empirical evidence of "what works," without adequate diagnosis of children's varying linguistic needs, without properly trained teachers or appropriate curricular materials, and often without the strong support of school administrators. Today, evidence of many good programs, according to such measures as improved academic performance, higher school retention rates, and enhanced self-concept among affected children, is beginning to emerge, the results of basic and operational research are at last being fed into the design of programs, and enough time has passed to begin producing a new cadre of qualified teachers. But the widespread impression has already been given that bilingual education has not been very effective, leading critics to conclude that the concept itself, as opposed to its implementation, is unsound.

Another source of controversy lies in the apparent departure of bilingual education from the traditional language policy of the schools. Immigrant groups have always been free to keep alive their native languages and

heritage through private efforts, but this has not, by and large, been considered the responsibility of the schools. On the contrary, public education in the 20th century has been employed as the chief means of assimilating children of foreign-language backgrounds into the English-speaking mainstream. Since the First World War, English has been the sole medium of instruction in the early grades. To many Americans, a belief in the appropriateness of such a policy, in which they cooperated, often at the price of the cultural heritage they brought with them, has formed a deep and abiding part of their national identity and consciousness. With the introduction of native languages in the classroom, however, this policy seems to have been reversed, and many people wonder what it all means. Some see it as but the first step on the road to official recognition of multilingualism, extending from the schools to other public institutions in the society. Already the concept of language *rights* has been established, the Voting Rights Act mandates bilingual election materials, interpreters are now required in courts of law, and languages other than English are increasingly being used in the delivery of social services in areas where there are large concentrations of nonEnglish speakers. Bilingual education therefore seems to be challenging some of our traditional assumptions and practices regarding cultural assimilation.

But perhaps no one of these concerns would be as great if bilingual education were not associated in the minds of large segments of society with Hispanic Americans. Currently, although the federal government funds programs using 74 languages, more than 65 percent of the money goes for Spanish-English bilingual education. The programs have been strongly promoted by Hispanic organizations, and the educational, political, and administrative leadership for bilingual education has been mainly Hispanic. Indeed, bilingual education, as a vehicle for heightening respect and recognition of native languages and culture, for fighting discrimination against nonEnglish-speaking groups, and for obtaining jobs and political leverage, has become the preeminent civil rights issue within Hispanic communities. This development, coupled with the fact that Hispanics, through natural increase and immigration, are growing rapidly in numbers, has made the issue more visible and politicized than it might otherwise have been. Bilingual education is no longer regarded strictly as an educational measure but also as a strategy for realizing the social, political, and economic aspirations of Hispanic peoples.

These three sets of concerns interlock, so that it is virtually impossible to discuss bilingual education without reference to the broader context in which it has evolved. At the same time, its very vulnerability to criticism on political grounds makes it especially incumbent upon this experiment to justify itself educationally. Nothing less will do justice to the needs of children from linguistic minorities and to the meaning of equal educational opportunity. This will be the major challenge of its supporters over the next few years.

The development of bilingual education

Contrary to popular belief, instruction in two languages is not new in American education. Its use began in the 19th century within private schools and some public schools in communities settled by German, Scandinavian, and French immigrants. Between 1840 and 1917, schools in Cincinnati offered classes in German to pupils who understood no English, and from time to time New York City schools resorted to Yiddish, German, Italian, and Chinese to educate new waves of foreign-born children. Then, around the First World War, when anti-German sentiment swept the country and speaking English became a kind of index of political loyalty and "adequacy" as a citizen, bilingual education was stamped out. In many states all use of foreign languages below the eighth grade was forbidden in the schools. The policy of Americanization, the cornerstone of which was instruction solely in English, then began in earnest.

A few educators at that time argued that submersion in the English-language curriculum was an unnecessarily harsh approach and that a gentler transition from the mother tongue was better for the children and their families. They also called for schools to respect and help keep alive the heritage these children brought with them. Their protests went unheeded, however, and the English-only policy remained throughout the succeeding decades (although many private or community-supported schools continued to offer dual-language instruction).

The modern revival of public bilingual education began in the early 1960's when schools in the Miami area, faced with a sudden influx of refugee Cuban students, responded by offering instruction in Spanish until the children were able to learn in English. The technique also began to be employed elsewhere — in New Mexico and in Texas, for example.

The concept received fresh impetus in the wake of the civil rights movement and a new national interest in ethnicity and cultural pluralism, which allowed minority groups to take a more outspoken pride in their heritage and their contributions to American life.

Federal attention to the educational problems of "linguistically different" children began in 1968 with the signing of the Bilingual Education Act, added as Title VII to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and brought about by a coalition of community leaders, educators, and legislators as well as some senior federal officials. It was clear to them that masses of children whose first language was not English were failing academically and that dropout rates for them were inordinately high. If they were receiving any special assistance in learning English, it was usually in the form of ESL (English as a Second Language) courses, requiring them to be taken out of regular classes for periods of the day, so that while they did indeed learn English, they lost the content and fell behind in their schoolwork.

The original aim of Title VII was modest enough: to give seed money to

local educational agencies for new and innovative elementary and secondary programs designed to meet the "special educational needs of children of limited English-speaking ability in schools having a high concentration of such children from families . . . with incomes below $3,000 per year."

Then, in 1974, the U. S. Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision on a lawsuit that changed the way in which bilingual education has been regarded ever since. The case, called *Lau vs. Nichols*, involved non-English-speaking Chinese students, who had accused the San Francisco Unified School District in 1970 of language discrimination because they were receiving instruction only in English, a language they could not understand and were not being helped to learn. They claimed that the absence of programs designed to meet their special needs violated both Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which contained a provision forbidding discrimination on the basis of national origin, and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

The Court agreed on the charge of language discrimination, basing its decision not on the Constitution but on Title VI as interpreted by existing Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) guidelines to the schools. These guidelines stated that, "Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national-origin minority-group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students."

The import of *Lau* was enormous. The Bilingual Education Act had already given federal validation to the voluntary use of native languages in the classroom. Now, for the first time, language rights were recognized as a civil right. Federally aided schools henceforth were legally obligated to provide special assistance to students with limited English-speaking ability in overcoming their language difficulties. Furthermore, schools were told that children must not be denied full participation in the educational process while they were learning English. The Court left it to the states and the educators to decide how this should be done, but because its decision relied on existing federal legislation and administrative intent, it left the way open for federal determination of what "affirmative steps" were acceptable under Title VI.

Following the *Lau* ruling the Office of Civil Rights of HEW issued informal guidelines, called "*Lau* remedies," which schools might take to provide equal educational opportunity for students of limited English-speaking ability. While the remedies did not mandate bilingual education, they specifically rejected the sole use of ESL at the elementary level as an instructional technique for students who spoke either little or no English. This was tantamount to requiring that bilingual programs be established, with ESL as a component, unless the schools could produce an equally acceptable alternative.

The Court's decision and the *Lau* remedies provided the underpinning for

lawsuits brought by organizations speaking for the rights of children from linguistic minorities, resulting in a number of court-mandated bilingual programs. In addition, under the influence of *Lau*, the Bilingual Education Act, when it was reauthorized in 1974, minimized the compensatory aspects of the program and stated that the aim of the Act was to "establish equal educational opportunity for all children."

In other ways *Lau* had far-reaching effects. It spurred the passage of many state bilingual education laws, overturning the prohibition against foreign-language teaching in the lower grades that had been in effect since World War I. And it stimulated, along with the federal Bilingual Education Act, activity around the country in linguistic, educational, social science, and legal research, in curriculum and materials development, and in teacher training, in the process giving rise to a whole new educational movement.

The Hispanic involvement in bilingual education

Of all linguistic minority groups, Hispanic Americans, by virtue of their numbers in the population if for no other reason, would seem to have the most at stake in the survival of bilingual education. Most of the advocacy work in the field has been conducted by Hispanic parent groups and by organizations such as the National Association of Bilingual Education, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Chicano Education Project, and Aspira of New York. Many see bilingual education as the single most effective mechanism at their disposal for focusing public attention on the educational plight of Hispanic children, for seeking redress for decades of discrimination against them by the schools, and for preparing them to succeed in the mainstream while promoting respect for their native language and cultural identity.

Estimates of the population of Hispanics in the United States are various. Difficulties stem from the failure of earlier censuses to make a full count of Spanish-surnamed residents and the impossibility of knowing how many undocumented workers of Hispanic origin are in the country at any given time. Nevertheless, assuming that there are possibly 3-to-6 million of the latter, the total number of persons of Hispanic background on the mainland is probably not less than 16 million, making up approximately 7 percent of the total population. A recent Congressional study of immigration has noted that more than one-third of all legal immigrants entering the country since 1965 have been Hispanic; the highest rate of unauthorized entry is also among this group. These and other demographic trends suggest that Hispanics may well be the nation's largest minority group by the end of the decade.

The term Hispanic applies, of course, to several distinct subgroups within the larger community. Nearly 60 percent, or some 7.3 million persons, are Mexican American. While perhaps as much as a third of the Mexican-American population is descended from citizens living in Mexican terri-

tory annexed in 1848, the majority appears to stem from later immigration, especially that which took place after 1920, following the Mexican revolution. The latest wave of immigration began in the late 1950's. Traditionally resident in the border states and other parts of the Southwest, Mexican Americans are also found in increasing numbers in the Midwest and Northwest.

The second largest subgroup is composed of people whose origins lie on the island of Puerto Rico. Some 1.7 million Puerto Ricans now reside on the mainland. Concentrated in the Northeast, more than a million live in New York City alone, although Chicago and Miami have growing Puerto Rican communities as well.

A third subgroup is the Cubans, most of whom came here in the early 1960's following the Communist revolution in their country. Living mainly in the Miami area, they now number close to 800,000.

A fourth subgroup, in addition to those descended from older stock originating in Spain, includes a rapidly growing new community of immigrants from the Caribbean and now Central and South American countries (other than Cuba and Mexico) such as the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Colombia. This group is believed to number around 2.2 million and, like the Puerto Rican community, is largely resident in the Northeast.

Hispanics, then, are an exceedingly heterogeneous population. What they have in common, however, far outweighs the differences among them, and this is a broad sense of ethnic identity based on allegiance to a shared mother language and culture. This sense of Hispanic identity is constantly being reinvigorated with persistent high rates of immigration and by the continual circulation of Hispanic peoples, especially Puerto Ricans and those of Mexican descent, to their home lands and back.

The very size and dominance of one linguistic and cultural group stands to have profound implications for educational policy in the United States. School enrollments of Hispanic children in some of our major cities alone tell a vivid story: In New York City, they currently comprise 30 percent of the school population; in Los Angeles 45 percent; in San Antonio 52 percent; in Miami 32 percent; in Denver 31 percent; in Hartford 35 percent. In the face of these figures, the question of how best to meet the educational needs of the children, a large proportion of whom speak only Spanish or are not sufficiently proficient in either English or Spanish, becomes one of paramount importance for the country in the years ahead.

Unfortunately, Hispanic children as a whole have not fared well in the public education system. Typically they are two to three grade levels behind other students. A mere 30 percent manage to complete high school. Nationwide, in urban ghetto areas, the school dropout rate for Hispanics reaches as high as 85 percent. Less than 7 percent have completed college. In 1975–76, Hispanics received only 2.8 percent of the B.A. degrees awarded, 2 percent

of the masters degrees, 2.6 percent of the law degrees, 2.3 percent of the medical degrees, and 1.2 percent of all doctorates.

Not surprisingly, the income figures for Hispanics are very low. In 1978, Hispanic Americans in general had a median annual family income of $12,600, compared with $17,600 for the nation as a whole. Puerto Ricans were the worst off, with a median family income of only $8,300 and 30 percent living in poverty. At the next level were Mexican Americans, with a median family income of $12,800 and 12 percent in poverty. Even the Cubans, who brought with them a professional class and benefited from substantial aid by the U. S. government, had a median family income of only $15,300 with 10 percent in poverty. Only 8 percent of Hispanics held professional and technical positions, compared with 16 percent of nonHispanics. Most were found in low-paying jobs in the service and manufacturing industries and in agriculture.

To be sure, the schools cannot alone be blamed for the dismal record of academic and economic achievement among Hispanics. Many Hispanic newcomers have tended to be poor, uneducated, and untrained for skilled jobs when they came here. They have been hindered in economic advancement by the language barrier, by their congregation into rural, suburban, and urban barrios, and by the cultural differences that have served to isolate them from the American mainstream and perpetuate their low social status.

But whatever weight may properly be given to the background of Hispanics themselves, the factor of discrimination must surely assume a major share of the responsibility for the academic problems of Hispanic students. Schools, as transmitters of society's values, in a variety of ways have made a signal contribution to the school performance rates of Hispanics—by shunting Spanish-speaking children from poor families into educational tracks designed for low achievers, by classifying them as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed, by denigrating their Hispanic heritage, by giving them the message that they cannot, or are not expected to, succeed. In short, the public education system as a whole has neither welcomed Hispanic children nor been willing to deal with their learning problems in any effective way.

Since, however, there is a clear correlation in this country between educational achievement and socioeconomic status, and since a high percentage of the Hispanic population is young—42 percent are under age 25—Hispanic parents and leaders, despite the past record of the public schools, place great hopes for the future of their communities on the schools' ability to educate their children. A principal tool they have chosen in order to achieve this is bilingual education.

The record to date

How, then, has bilingual education served Hispanic children under the impact of federal legislative, judicial, and administrative action?

The answer is a mixed one. The bilingual education movement has un-

questionably shown remarkable growth and energy over the past 12 years, propelled along by Hispanic leaders and some educators and policy makers. But its proponents have had reason to despair over the many problems of implementing it effectively on a broad scale. In this regard the recent history of bilingual education is probably not too different from that of Head Start, Follow-Through, and other educational inventions of the Great Society intended to help disadvantaged children. Similarly, bilingual education now finds itself on the defensive. Three years remain before the Bilingual Education Act comes up for reauthorization, and in that time, all those who believe in it will be under obligation to prove its worth to an increasingly skeptical public.

The federal effort in bilingual education was originally seen by its sponsors almost exclusively as a means of correcting English-language deficiencies in primary-school children, with the rationale that it could help them make the transition from the mother tongue to English and promote assimilation into mainstream education. It has therefore been viewed largely as a compensatory measure for students who have fallen behind or who are likely to do so. It has *not* had as its central aim the fostering and maintaining of competence in two languages, although some federal monies have in fact been used for what have turned out to be "maintenance" programs, and school districts are free to implement two-language instruction through all grade levels if they choose.

Little, however, has been known about the exact nature of such programs and their progress in achieving their academic and linguistic goals, and much of the fault, it appears, can be laid to laxity in federal planning and supervision. As one researcher pointed out, before 1978 less than .25 percent of Title VII funds were spent for basic and operational research on bilingual education; a good deal of the existing evaluation research, moreover, has been judged worthless. The first Bilingual Education Act included no funds for research at all. The emphasis, it seems, was on immediate action, without much prior understanding of what measures should be taken with children showing varying degrees of proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending English.

In fact funding for research has greatly expanded recently. The federal government spent $2 million for research in 1979; $4.6 million is being spent in 1980; and appropriations total $6 million for 1981. Additionally, evidence is mounting that, in favorable circumstances, programs of high quality do meet the goal of providing equal educational opportunity for students of non-English-speaking backgrounds. A 1978 review of program evaluations by the Center for Applied Linguistics found at least 12 programs in which bilingual education students performed as well (or better) on tests of reading, writing, math concepts, and social science, and other measures as comparable groups in regular classes. Attendance figures for bilingual students were in general

higher than would otherwise have been the case, and there were indications that many students showed a positive attitude toward the programs and their academic capabilities.

A study of evaluation reports of bilingual programs in Colorado showed that such programs had been generally effective in improving the English reading skills of students as well as improving school attendance and dropout rates. They also helped bring about greater parental involvement in school programs.

Other long-term studies suggest that bilingual instruction may have a cumulative effect, with results that may not show up in short-term, one-year-at-a-time evaluations. This is a critical point, which suggests that bilingual education, as with other special programs for educationally disadvantaged students, must be given a longer time to work than had been thought.

Perhaps the most interesting research, which may have a bearing on the American experience, is a study of Finnish immigrant children in Sweden. These children were more likely to approach the norms of Swedish students when they emigrated to Sweden around the age of 10 or 12, *after* they had five or six years of education in their native language in Finland. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest, too, that Mexican children who emigrate to the United States after the sixth grade out-perform Mexican-American children who have been in the country since the first grade. Apparently, submersion in a second language before these children reach the age of 10 can exert a "destabilizing" effect on the development of their native language as a tool for mastering cognitive concepts, with the result that they become semi-lingual—not fully competent in either language. Since this condition applies to a large number of Hispanic children, who like the Finnish are members of a dominated minority group, such findings indicate that the students would fare better if they received instruction entirely in their native language for the first few grades before shifting into English.

Another serious problem has been the lack of adequately trained teachers. Teaching in two languages needs special preparation: a teacher who happens to be bilingual is not automatically qualified to undertake bilingual instruction; nor is a monolingual teacher who has taken a few courses in a second language up to the job. Yet, before 1974, no federal monies were appropriated for preservice teacher training, and only in 1978 were Title VII funds allocated for fellowship programs at the doctoral level.

In addition, determination of *Lau* violations by HEW and enforcement of remedies to comply with the law have proceeded slowly. Schools have been required to meet the needs of linguistically different children whether or not they receive federal assistance for the purpose. Thus, schools blame budgetary constraints for their failure to comply, and HEW, leery of applying the extreme measure of withholding funds, has allowed investigations to languish. Lack of government monitoring has also apparently permitted infractions in some schools that ostensibly have complied.

Practically speaking, then, the *Lau* remedies have not thus far had much direct effect; the leverage has consisted mainly in the implicit threat of sanctions. This may change in the future, however: monitoring and enforcement efforts have stepped up, and proposals to revise and formalize the *Lau* guidelines are under consideration. If approved, the new regulations would specifically mandate bilingual programs at both the elementary and secondary education levels, and children who have comparatively limited proficiency in either their home language or English would be covered—a measure that could vastly increase the numbers receiving bilingual instruction.

An influential study of Title VII projects begun in 1976 and sponsored by the Office of Education (OE) produced striking indications of many poor programs in the country—programs that were producing no academic gains for students or, in some cases, were actually allowing them to fall behind. This study was justifiably criticized for flaws in the research design, but it nonetheless dealt a blow to bilingual education's reputation.

Under the impact of the OE study, and in consultation with organizations working in the field of bilingual education, the guidelines for the 1978 Amendments to the Bilingual Education Act were strengthened. In addition to committing substantial funds for research and teacher preparation, the Act now covers linguistically different children who not only have difficulty speaking and understanding the English language but who need help reading and writing it. At the same time, it limits funding largely to programs aimed at helping children achieve competence in the English language, rather than, as in the 1974 Amendments, helping them "progress effectively through the school system." They affirm the desirability of parent involvement in decision making. They also allow for up to 40 percent of the participants to be children whose first language is English, and they authorize more money for curriculum development. Finally, the guidelines require that applicants demonstrate that federal grants would gradually be replaced by local or state funds to help achieve a regularly funded program.

The prospects for bilingual education

Whether measures to bring about needed reforms in the implementation of bilingual programs succeed or fail, the *Lau* ruling will of course remain in effect. Schools will still have to meet the needs of linguistically different children and provide them with a meaningful education that meets the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. On these grounds alone, it seems likely that some form of bilingual education will continue to be included among the methods chosen to deal with the language difficulties of these children—unless there is another major court decision that reverses or modifies the earlier ruling.

Whatever happens, the fact remains that at least 1.75 million Hispanic children have limited proficiency in English and need some form of special

language assistance before they can fully participate in the educational system. Since neither quick submersion in regular classes nor ESL alone has worked well with children from low-income, nonEnglish-speaking backgrounds, teaching such youngsters in their first language while they are learning English would appear to be a sensible alternative.

There is also the reality that many Hispanic organizations and parents want bilingual programs for their children, not only to help them master English-language skills but to help them maintain their first language. They have built an effective national constituency for it, with a leadership that has played a significant part in the formation of bilingual education policy. The growing Hispanic population and its increasing voting strength make this a group that all levels of government must reckon with. If Hispanic citizens press for bilingual programs, then educators and policy makers cannot avoid listening.

Furthermore, bilingual education has afforded Hispanic adults a significant route to social mobility and economic security. It has created bilingual teachers, administrators, bureaucrats at all government levels, curriculum developers, and researchers—the whole range of bilingual personnel needed to run this important new educational movement. In the process, it has established positive role models for young people, holding out for them new types of satisfying career prospects.

Additionally, bilingual education has served as a stimulus for Hispanic parents to begin playing an active role in the schools, for the first time taking part in decisions affecting the quality of education their children receive. Whatever the results in the strictest terms of academic performance, bilingual education, they believe, has already helped to improve the way in which the educational system deals with their children. Schools have been less quick to shunt youngsters into low educational tracks or treat them with disrespect. Many parents are convinced that without bilingual education, the schools will go back to their former behavior, so they will continue to fight for it.

Then, since the concept of language rights has gained a recognized legal status, and since Hispanics are enjoying a more visible pride in their heritage, the use of Spanish in the schools has acquired great symbolic value. Hispanics can look forward to the day when their native language is no longer regarded as inferior, when it no longer offers the excuse for an ethnic slur and a means of destroying the self-confidence and self-esteem of a child.

Altogether, bilingual education has served as a vehicle to enable Hispanic people to press for their language rights at the same time giving them a major point of entry into all other issues having to do with opportunities and rights for Hispanics, and providing an avenue for their participation in the political process through election to school boards and other offices.

Historical and future context

Beyond these current trends there is, however, a broader context for thinking about bilingual education as an appropriate response to the educational needs of Hispanic children. One aspect of this concerns our special relationship with Puerto Rico and Mexico—a relationship established through two wars.

The United States annexed Puerto Rico in 1898 following its war with Spain. In 1917 the inhabitants became American citizens, albeit second-class citizens by virtue of Puerto Rico's status first as a U. S. territory and then as a commonwealth. Subsequently, the United States vacillated in its attitudes toward an English-language policy in Puerto Rican schools, causing a great deal of hardship for children and their families. Then, in 1947, it finally and officially declared the island Spanish-speaking in recognition of the reality and the desire of the people. Economic distress on the island after the Second World War brought millions of Puerto Ricans to New York City and elsewhere in search of jobs. Since 1970, however, there has been a consistent trend of net return migration. This two-way migratory flow has allowed mainland Puerto Ricans to sustain their ties to the island, but in doing so it has slowed the process of adaptation to American life and exposed Puerto Rican children to learning problems and discriminatory treatment in the schools. On the island, the so-called Neo-Rican children returning from the mainland are facing similar learning problems and discrimination.

Bilingual education would seem to be one obvious answer for dealing with these children. The argument for it can be made on practical grounds alone, but the claim for special treatment also gains emotional and political force because Puerto Rico is simply part of this nation. Following the Supreme Court's decision on *Lau*, a case brought by Aspira of New York against the New York City Board of Education was resolved by a consent decree mandating the implementation of bilingual education in city schools. Unfortunately, the law has proved difficult to enforce, and it covers only those students who are dominant in Spanish; it does not apply to children who are semilingual. Only in 1978 were federal funds finally authorized to help such children in Puerto Rican schools. Bilingual education for Puerto Rican children is obviously still more a goal than a reality.

The United States acquired half of Mexico's territory at the close of the Mexican-American War in 1848. At that time approximately 75,000 Mexicans living in what became U. S. territory were given the choice of becoming Americans or leaving the country. Most chose to stay. Although the treaty arrangements did not expressly guarantee the rights of the new citizens to retain their customs and language, the governments of the territories (later the states) of New Mexico, California, and Colorado acknowledged their constitutional obligations to Spanish-speaking citizens. Early legislative ses-

sions were conducted in both English and Spanish. The 1891 constitution of the New Mexico territory mandated public bilingual education.

Subsequently, however, Mexican Americans came to be mistreated by their adopted country. In Texas, after the Civil War, no provision whatsoever was made for the education of Mexican-American children. When they were eventually allowed into the schools, they were segregated from Anglo children because of their "language handicap." Considered by school authorities to be children of an inferior race, they were often punished for speaking Spanish, heard their names involuntarily Anglicized, and saw their cultural background systematically ignored in textbooks. Indeed, with the exception of blacks and Native Americans, no other ethnic group has been subjected to quite the same combination of racial and cultural insult as the Hispanics of the Southwest. Prior to 1940 it is estimated that only 1 percent of Mexican-American children of school age was actually enrolled in school.

This history is deeply etched in the minds of the present generation of Mexican-American leaders and encourages them to regard bilingual education as an instrument for redressing the wrongs of the past. Their attitude stems not only from the experience of the last century but from the knowledge that Spanish speakers were among the first immigrants to this country. The chronicles of the Spanish explorers of the 1500's predate those of the British. The names of important cities, towns, and states are a constant reminder of early Spanish settlements and governance in what is today the United States, reinforcing the feeling that Mexican Americans have a right to public recognition of their language.

Another aspect of our relationship with Mexico which has a bearing on bilingual policy concerns the influx of undocumented workers from there into the United States. The current wave began in the late 1950's and accelerated in the mid-1960's with the cancellation of a series of bilateral agreements which had allowed Mexican workers to come to this country for short periods of time and protected their rights to some extent while they were here. Since then, millions of Mexicans, attracted by the promise of jobs, have entered this country illegally, settling mainly in urban areas where they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. On the one hand, they are accused of taking jobs which rightfully belong to American citizens, including Hispanic Americans; on the other, they are said to fill jobs that no one else will take. To some extent their hidden presence places a burden on public services, such as the educational and health systems, because they are not counted in the formulas that determine eligibility for funding under federal and state aid programs. At the same time, they may be contributing more to the economy than they take from it: a U. S. Department of Labor study estimated that 77 percent pay social security taxes, the benefits of which they are unlikely to collect, 72 percent have federal income taxes deducted from their wages, all pay local

and state sales taxes on consumer purchases, less than 1 percent are on welfare, and less than 8 percent appear to have their children in school.

Any solution to this situation will have to be worked out between Mexico and the United States and necessarily will be long in coming; it will not diminish migration to the north in the near future. In the meantime something must be done to educate the children of illegal immigrants. Those who are born in this country are of course American citizens and entitled to a public education. That scarcely 8 percent of children of undocumented workers here are in school, however, should be no cause for satisfaction, for many of them will remain in this country permanently and grow up unprepared to compete in our increasingly technological society. The state policy in Texas of excluding children of illegal aliens from public schools has been challenged by Mexican parents, and the case is currently being reviewed in a federal district court. The state argues that any requirement to educate these children would siphon off resources from American citizens and that the schools, at least in the border area, cannot afford it. Just how much effect any liberalization in the state law would have on the actual enrollment of Mexican children remains to be seen, but the implications for educational policy seem clear and point toward forms of special language assistance that involve the use of Spanish, the only language most of these children speak.

Another perspective that bears on the schools' use of bilingual education has to do with the radically changed economic and social conditions of today as against those of the past and the circumstances in which Hispanics find themselves competing with other groups for jobs and a decent life.

Prior to the First World War the country needed large amounts of cheap labor, and it encouraged immigrants to come here by the millions. Jobs existed not only for them but for their children. Compulsory education existed in name only, and the school-leaving age was 12. If foreign-born students could not succeed in school, there was an immediate place for them in the factories or on farms. No one was surplus; everyone was needed.

It was only later, after the First World War, after there was a glut in the labor market of unskilled workers and immigration was restricted, that our rapidly advancing technological society began to need a better educated labor force. Then the schools took on a new importance opposition to the new child labor laws and to compulsory education declined and disappeared, the school-leaving age was raised to 16, and immigrant families began to make the sacrifices necessary to see that their children got the high school credentials that would ensure their future success. The phenomenon of rising educational levels entered a wholly new phase after the Second World War, when an enormous demand developed for higher education, and a college degree came to be recognized as the minimum qualification for many jobs. Millions of young people whose parents had not attended college or even finished high school, including many who were the children or grandchildren of immi-

grants, flocked into higher education as it changed rapidly from an elitist institution to a vast democratic enterprise.

Poor people of Hispanic background, however, have come to this country late in the day, into a highly developed, mature society, offering less of the opportunity to build a nation enjoyed by new arrivals at the turn of the century. Their difficulties have been compounded by racial prejudice, by the language barrier, and by their isolation into segregated neighborhoods and schools, locking many of them into low-level, marginal jobs. Thus, even though the economic rewards are still great enough to encourage continued heavy migration, the promise of social mobility for the less educated has greatly diminished.

Bilingual education is certainly not a total panacea, but if it proves an effective measure for helping Hispanic children to develop the self-confidence and ability to perform well in school and stay there until they gain the needed credentials, then its implementation on the widest possible scale may be justified, for the alternatives are bleak indeed.

Working in favor of such special efforts to see that Hispanic students succeed are demographic trends. Hispanics, with their relatively high fertility and immigration rates, are producing a significant and growing part of today's relatively small cohort of children on whom the burden later of an aging American society is going to be exceedingly heavy. It may be asked whether in these circumstances the country can continue to afford treating any proportion of its youth as expendable. If not, we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that in furthering the education of Hispanic children we would be doing it out of the goodness of our hearts; we would be doing it for ourselves as well.

In at least one other respect conditions have changed from earlier days. A large proportion of the 13 million people who came here between 1900 and 1914 to meet the demand for cheap labor were from southern and eastern Europe. Growing fears that they would dilute the "basic strain of the population" and turn the United States into a "collection of foreign colonies" to some extent overlapped the anti-German sentiment already referred to and helped foster the Americanization program in the schools.

Perhaps such a policy, with the sacrifices exacted in human welfare and cultural enrichment to the nation, were necessary when a sense of nationhood had to be forged out of a multilingual, multicultural population. But the question can certainly be posed as to whether today's circumstances do not warrant a more humane approach to the education and acculturation of linguistic minorities. Are we not secure enough in our national identity to risk some relaxation of our earlier prohibitions and tolerate the kind of cultural and linguistic pluralism Hispanics are seeking without feeling that the cohesiveness of the nation is threatened? Should we not accept the assurances of Hispanic leaders that their goal is not separatism but simply the right to

become active participants in the nation's economic, social, and political institutions without abandoning the language and culture that mean so much to them? If bilingual education offers adults and their children an opportunity for achieving this kind of participation, should this opportunity be denied them?

Looking into the future, there is another way of assessing the value of instruction in two languages in schools at the elementary level. One consequence of the elimination of bilingual education during the First World War was to create our national bias against foreign-language acquisition and to make respectable our ignorance of other societies. In its late 1979 report, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies stated that, "America's incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous, and it is becoming worse . . . ." To Commission members and many other observers of international affairs, the decline of foreign-language facility and teaching generally in the country is symptomatic of a short-sighted and dangerous ethnocentrism that has infected the nation. Pitifully few Americans can converse in a foreign tongue or read a foreign newspaper even where the language is one used by their parents or by themselves in childhood. Members of bilingual as well as monolingual groups in the United States are often surprised to learn that there are many nations where bilingual education is normal for all students and where the ability to speak more than one language well is a *sine qua non* for entry into the business, professional, and administrative elite of the society.

The most obvious corrective for the woeful situation in this country, of course, would be greatly increased foreign-language instruction for all children, starting at the elementary level and continuing through high school, and the most obvious choice of language in many regions would be Spanish. Today, the United States has the fourth largest Spanish-speaking population of any country in the western hemisphere. New York has the fifth largest Spanish-speaking population of any city. It is projected that by the 21st century two out of three inhabitants in the western hemisphere will be of Latin American extraction. More persons will speak Spanish than any other language of the Americas, including English. Spanish-language fluency in New York City and elsewhere has already become an advantage in employment opportunities. In all a favorable environment is being created for the acquisition and maintenance of Spanish-speaking skills among members of the Spanish *and* Anglo communities, regardless of whether the Spanish language is taught in the schools.

The growing recognition of the importance of foreign-language acquisition is not inconsistent with the opinion of many Hispanic proponents of bilingual education, who believe that it should not be for their community alone, with the sole objective of assimilation into mainstream America, but should be for *all* children, English-speaking as well as Spanish-speaking, to help prepare them for the world of the future. Only when bilingual education becomes a

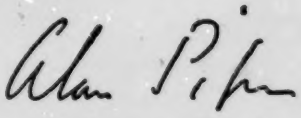
desirable choice to English speakers, they add, will the movement be relieved of its stigma of being a compensatory program to help the disadvantaged and be protected from funding cutbacks and threats of extinction.

Final thoughts

These pragmatic and broad historical and philosophical arguments, however, are not alone sufficient to justify the continuation of the bilingual education experiment as it is now conceived. Such a justification can only come from solid evidence that this new technique is succeeding--directly by improving the capacity of Hispanic children to learn *in English* and indirectly by stimulating parents and schools to give more serious attention to the educational needs of these youngsters. What is needed, now, is a determined effort by all concerned to improve bilingual education programs in the schools through more sympathetic administration and community support, more and better trained teachers, and a sustained, sophisticated, and well-financed research effort to find out where these programs are succeeding and where they are failing and why.

It goes without saying, therefore, that advocates of bilingual education should be wary of advancing rationales for it that go beyond its strictly educational purpose of helping children acquire the intellectual skills they will need to compete successfully in the American mainstream. Such arguments, surely, will simply exacerbate the considerable hostility that already exists toward bilingual education and heighten the resistance evident today among more affluent white Americans to any public expenditure aimed at improving the schooling of poor children of minority background. That trend, which has economic, racial, linguistic, and geographic dimensions, is already cause for deep concern, since its chief victims are children.

As for Hispanic children, their education is far too important a matter to be left to chance, vague hopes, rhetoric, or politics. All of us have an undeniable stake in their induction into the larger American society and their preparation to be effective, productive citizens. They are an inescapable part of the nation's future and therefore of all our futures.



President